



Election 2019

Education: The strongest foundation for our future

**Issues and questions
for candidates**



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The upcoming election is an opportunity for voters to shape the future of our province. The next government will be making critical decisions in areas that affect the daily lives of Manitobans: healthcare, roads and infrastructure, crime reduction strategies, economic development, and education.

All of these issues are important, but none more so than education. The impact of education on other determinants of well-being is well understood. Educated populations are healthier, and less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Good schools are far less expensive to operate than jails. Education is critical to building a skilled workforce, and a skilled workforce not only provides the solid tax base we need for social services, but is also less reliant on those same services.

Supporting education is an investment in our future that benefits everyone. This election is our opportunity to let candidates know that we value education, and to support those that share this value.

Why education now?

Education is always an important election issue, but 2019 is a watershed year in Manitoba. In January, the government launched a Commission to review K-12 education. Thousands of Manitobans shared their thoughts, through online surveys, written submissions, and public consultations. Formal consultations concluded in June, and the Commission will spend the next several months preparing its report and recommendations. Those will be made public in March 2020, and the government we elect in September will decide what actions to take.



The Commission's areas of focus—vision, learning and teaching, accountability, governance, and funding—clearly outline what's under consideration. What do you see as the current strengths, challenges and opportunities in these aspects of our public school system, and what would you like to see changed or preserved in our K-12 system?

Helping all students learn

Public schools welcome all children and youth through their doors, resulting in a diverse student population. That diversity is one of the strengths of public education, but if schools are to fulfill their core mandate of ensuring that all students achieve at a high level, additional supports are sometimes required. Whether it's specialized language instruction for newcomers, occupational or physical therapy for a child with special needs, or clinical intervention for one in crisis, these students must be supported. In our public schools, one size does not fit all.



Are you aware of the diversity that exists in Manitoba's public school population? What would you do to ensure that schools have the resources they need to support every student so they can thrive and achieve at a high level?

Beyond school walls

Health and education have a symbiotic relationship. Just as education tends to improve health, good health is one of the determinants of positive educational outcomes, and children living in poverty too often shoulder the consequences of both diminished health and lower educational outcomes. Schools work to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on their students' learning and health through initiatives such as meal programs, pre-school outreach to families, and summer enrichment programs, but schools cannot tackle the challenge of poverty alone. It will take a concerted effort by all levels of government, as well as other public and private institutions, to not only address the effects of poverty, but also its underlying causes.



Do you support the efforts of schools in your community to help students overcome the negative effects of poverty on their health and education? What is your understanding of the relative responsibility of schools, municipalities, and the provincial government in supporting students and families in poverty? Are there specific provincial initiatives you support that would help in this regard?

Preserving local voice

All Manitoba public schools provide a solid core education based on the provincially mandated curriculum, but not all schools are the same. Some offer programming that helps preserve community heritage for future generations, such as language courses. Pre-school programming helps ensure that students are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, but that programming takes many different forms across the province. At the other end of K-12 spectrum, school divisions partner with local businesses, post-secondary institutions, and neighbouring divisions to develop technical and vocational programming that helps youth transition to the workforce and communities grow and prosper. Programs such as these are made possible because of funds raised by the special levy, the property tax set by school boards to support education.



Are you familiar with the types of locally-supported programming that exists in schools in your community? How would you work to ensure that communities retain the ability to shape schools to meet their specific needs and wishes?

The value of school boards

Manitoba has 37 elected school boards, comprised of almost 300 school trustees. School trustees are not full-time employees with benefits; they are community representatives, working for minimal compensation to govern local schools. Provincially, the cost of school boards amounts to 0.5% of the provincial education operating budget. An additional 3% pays for the highly qualified administrators needed to manage and lead educators and other staff in the complex business of education. Combined, board and administration costs total 3.5% of operating budgets, an amount that is capped by law and which compares favourably to other levels of government. This means that more than 95% of education dollars are spent in classrooms, paying for operations and maintenance, and transporting students.

Some argue that Manitoba has too many school divisions, simply because other provinces may have fewer. But reducing school divisions does not reduce costs, as was shown when mandated amalgamations reduced the number from 54 to 37 in 2001. What it does do is increase costs, create a great deal of disruption and uncertainty in the system, and dilute community voice. If we are going to reduce the number of school divisions in Manitoba, we need to do so for a better reason than “because everyone else is doing it”—and objectively, that reason does not exist.



Do you know what school boards actually do in Manitoba? Do you believe that they add value to our public school system? Are you willing to work cooperatively with school boards in your community to the benefit of local students and schools? Do you support the current configuration of school divisions in Manitoba, and if not, how do you think it should be changed?



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